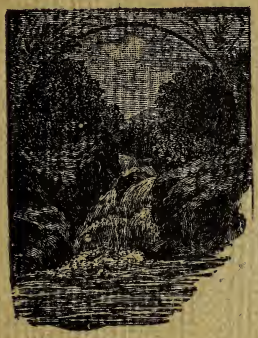

The Call of the Hills

and other Poems.

By E. J. SILLETT.

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AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

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THE CALL OF THE HILLS

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY E. J. SILLETT.

WITH A PREFACE BY J. W. WALLACE,
Author of "Walt Whitman and the World Crisis," &c.,
and Joint Author of "Visits to Walt Whitman."

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I sometimes get a happy thought
To weave in simple song,
But words come scarce to form that verse
To pass the thought along.

Yet I will do the best I can,
Just sing as best I may,
And give the thought reflection brought
To cheer a cloudy day.

PREFACE.

The poems contained in this little volume are hereby published in response to the urgent requests of many friends of the Author.

Written during a period of severe bodily afflictions—including blindness since April, 1918, and paralysis of the lower limbs since early in 1921—they have had their origin in the depths of the writer's heart and soul, and will doubtless win an entry into the hearts of all sympathetic readers. For they reveal a sustaining faith and cheer which have been very gravely and painfully tested, and are an inspiring witness to the inherent power of the human soul to rise above adverse external conditions into its native heaven of freedom and joy.

Not the least part of their merit lies in their obvious and rugged sincerity, and in the absence from them of the sophistications and literary arts and tricks of the professional writer. The author's blindness has prevented him from giving them the perfection of form he would desire, but the genuineness of the thoughts and feelings they express outweighs in importance their technical defects, and here and

there finds appropriate utterance in the spontaneity and music of true Song.

Mr. Sillett spent two years of his early life at sea, sailing in several vessels, and visiting many ports in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov, and along the eastern seaboard of North America, and taking every opportunity to explore the inland districts adjacent to them. These early experiences have never been forgotten by him, and have been an important formative influence in his mental development. After leaving the sea he entered the office of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, where he was employed for over thirty-one years, until he became blind. He has always been an ardent lover of Nature and of out-door life, and has spent much of his leisure in cycling with a congenial friend into the country, and musing by streams and hills and woodlands, in rapt communion with "the eloquent, dumb, great Mother." It is interesting to note in this connection that, though he has seen many distant lands, Northumberland and the Border country hold his deepest affection. He is naturally of a serious turn of mind, and he has quietly pondered much over the great problems and mysteries of life and the world, and has fed his mind and soul by study of some of the best books, including Whitman, Carpenter, and Oriental writers. When his blindness began he learned to read books printed in Braille type, and these have been a great solace and help to him.

One has only to imagine, so far as one can, what the change must have been to him, from his former life to the comparative solitude and inactivity of blindness and partial

paralysis, to realise in some degree the circumstances under which the following poems have been written, and their inner significance and vital lessons to us all. He has met the changes in his lot with manly courage and fortitude and with unfaltering trust and cheer. And his reward has been that in his external darkness he has found within himself an increasing Light, and a vision which sees below appearances into the heart of things. The Presence which he used to feel in external Nature, at sea or amongst the hills, is still with him in the memories and contemplation of her wordless messages. He knows that in all our experiences, however painful, an infinite Love attends us, and that the whole Creation moves to a music known only to the wise. "All deep things," says Carlyle, "are Song. It seems somehow the central essence of us, Song; as if all the rest were but wrappages and hulls! The primal element of us; of us, and of all things." And so Mr. Sillett has felt impelled to utter himself in song, that he may communicate to others the cheer and exultation which have come to him in his time of need. And his deepest wish for this little book will be that in its own place and degree it may fulfil that cherished purpose.

J. W. Wallace.

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THE CALL OF THE HILLS.

O ! I'm longing for the green hills,
They are calling me away ;
So I take the road tomorrow
At the breaking of the day ;
And as I leave the city
I will chant a merry ditty,
For I'm tramping to the green hills
With a heart that's light and gay.

O ! I'm longing for the green hills,
And the scent of meadow hay ;
To lie beside the little burn,
And watch the trout at play ;
So, good-bye care and sorrow,
I will take the road to-morrow,
For my own green hills are calling,
And the call I must obey.

The rougher the sea, the nearer the bar ;
The darker the night, the brighter the star ;
The higher you climb the more you will see,
There's always a bright side where'er you may be.

THE VENERABLE BEDE.

On a drab little mound, a sacred old shrine
Stands silent and grey mid the noise of the Tyne ;
Here the saint and the scholar planted the seed ;
Here lived and here died the Ven'rable Bede.

The rose tints of sunset have passed to the west,
The din of the river is lulling to rest ;
And here neath thy shadow by some mystic spell
I seem to hear ringing the old vesper bell.

Then time seems to roll back his curtain again,
And out on the night comes a soft dulcet strain ;
It kindles my soul with a purer desire—
An old vesper hymn by the monks in the choir.

Then out through the silence with holy restraint
I hear faintly calling the voice of the saint—
" Do write quickly," he says, " write quickly my son,
The Gospel is finished, my work is now done."

The spell here is broken, my vision is o'er ;
A rude sound awakes me—it comes from the shore ;
But thanks for the dream of a far distant day,
At that sacred old shrine where Bede knelt to pray.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Northumberland! Northumberland!
How dear thou art to me,
Thy hill and glen, thy sturdy men,
Thy rolling restless sea.

Thy border lore and battle song,
Flodden's tragic story;
With saint and sage in every age,
Shedding forth thy glory.

There's not a patch of thy green earth
But calleth back to me
Some stirring song, some battle long,
Some deed of chivalry.

So let them sing in Devon's praise,
Or Cornwall's mystic strand;
Whate'er they say, I'll chant my lay
To old Northumberland.

DO NOT FRET.

Are you sad at heart to-day ?
Are you weary on the way ?
Press along and see it through,
Darkest clouds are domed with blue,
And the sun still shines for you ;
Do not fret.

Are you lonely on the road ?
Do you bend beneath the load ?
Step it out and do not fear,
Angel friends are very near,
Let the smile o'ercome the tear ;
Do not fret.

You have heard the mighty thunder of the ocean ?
You have heard the gentle ripple of the rills ?
But you've never heard the voice that's born of silence?
Then, go listen mid the quiet of the hills !

THE BYEROAD.

Oh ! some folk love the city streets,
They say that life is there ;
And some, they love the broad highway,
The busy thoroughfare ;
But I do love the shy road,
The green and woody byeroad,
It always will be my road,
It windeth anywhere.

So ! they may have the city life
With all its sumptuous fare,
And they may have the open road,
And in its wonders share ;
But I will take the shy road,
The green and woody byeroad,
It always will be my road,
Because its quiet there.

THE SONG OF THE LARK.

O lark, seraphic singer!
Soaring in sky of blue,
In seas of light my thoughts take flight,
And mount the heights with you.

My heart would know the secret
Of your sweet melody,
So let thought wing those heights and bring
Your secret down to me.

As the sky unto the ocean
Gives its own distinctive hue,
So the smile you give to others
Will come smiling back to you.

NORTHUMBRIAN HILLS.

I have wandered afar, have sailed the blue ocean,
I have tramped the brown moorland and stood on the lea ;
But of all the fair scenes that hold my devotion,
The Northumbrian Hills are the dearest to me.

Let other men sing of their mountains and splendour,
With purple clad heather and far gleaming sea ;
This song cometh straight from the heart of the sender,
Green Northumbrian Hills, it's a token from me.

The hush of the night, and the mist of the morning,
The bleating of lambs in their timorous glee ;
These sights and these sounds—they are ever returning,
Green Northumbrian Hills, ye are calling to me.

O glamourous land, rich in song, scene and story !
With thy old battle walls from the west to the sea,
All tell of thy past, of thy own matchless glory—
Green Northumbrian Hills, all are precious to me.

WHAT THE BLIND SEE.

It's a funny world we live in,
And take it straight from me,
You don't see half the funny things
Unless you cannot see.

If this should seem a paradox,
To make the test complete,
Just cover up your blinking eyes
And walk the busy street.

I've had a few excursions,
And I don't mind telling you
The funny things that happen
When you lose your point of view.

In serving my apprenticeship
I learnt without delay,
A chap may lose his eyesight
But he needn't lose his way.

If he does he doesn't mind,
Nor does he get down-hearted,
Odds are always on his side,
He'll land back where he started.

It didn't take me long to learn
In passing to and fro,
That things were very touchy,
And 'twas often touch and go.

It's not the standing objects
A blind chap has to fear ;
He has learnt just where to find them
And he knows just how to steer.

But the living things keep moving,
They move at such a pace,
One hasn't got a doggie's chance
Against the human race.

Have you ever heard the story
Of a Tommy in the train?
A man was sitting opposite,
A man of mighty brain;

He said, "I see you've lost an arm,"
The lad with calm delight,
Just shook the empty sleeve and said
"By Jove! I see you're right."

Excuse this short digression,
As it only goes to show
That folks will keep on telling you
The things you really know.

In my perambulations
I was constantly beset,
Incessantly reminded of
A fact I would forget.

"That poor man's blind," says one,
"He can't see," says another,
And thus, *ad infinitum*;
The lot I'd like to smother.

But there, I think I've said enough
To make you all agree,
That things are most diverting
When a fellow cannot see.

There's a moral to my story,
Let me whisper in your ear,
We may be all as blind as bats,
But remember, we can hear.

DIOGENES.

Diogenes, Philosopher :
  He was a queer old man ;
He lived within a tiny tub,
  The simple life his plan.

He walked the grand Athenian streets,
  He sauntered in and out,
And smiled to see so many things
  That he could do without.

Then nightly to that tiny tub
  Serene he would retire ;
The richest man of all the lot,
  Because he lacked desire.

The King called on Diogenes—
  The day was warm and bright—
He asked " Can I do aught for you,"
  " Yes, Sire, stand out my light ! "

Diogenes, Philosopher ;
  He was a queer old man ;
He lived within a tiny tub,
  The simple life his plan.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY.

My mother was a Scotch lass,
  My father French they say,
And I was born in Glasgae,
  On good St. Patrick's Day.

Now I can speak nae Heilan,
  Nor can I "Parlez Vous,"
But I can shout with gusto,
  "Begorra!" and "Hurroo!"

So bhoys, just take your partners,
  And clear the sticks away,
And we will shake the rafters
  On this St. Patrick's Day.

Two men looked through a window,
  Far stretched the landscape lay;
One man saw but obstacles,
  The other found a way.

WHEN I WAS JUST A KIDDIE.

When I was just a kiddie,
As poor as one could be,
My parents dead, to earn my bread,
I took myself to sea.

Forty years have come and gone,
Ah me! how time does fly,
Since I came home, across the foam,
No more with ships to ply.

But I am still a sailor!
The salt is still in me!
And when I die, I'd long to lie
Beneath the stars at sea.

So, wrap me in tarpaulin
And launch me on the deep;
Then once again I'll roll the main,
And happy I shall sleep.

SONG OF THE BORDER,

My heart would have me sing a song,
It beats with impulse wild and strong,
It swiftly sweeps my thoughts along,
And puts my words in order ;
I cannot help but sing to thee,
For thou hast cast thy spell on me,
Dear land of love's sweet minstrelsy,
Thou heart entrancing border.

I sing thee Cheviot, solemn, grand,
And all the hills that round thee stand ;
With babbling brooks by nature planned,
To tumble in disorder.
I sing thee Tweed, the haunt of Scott,
I sing thee Flodden, hallowed spot ;
Thy gallant sons are ne'er forgot,
But cherished on the border.

JUST ACCORDING TO YOUR POINT OF VIEW.

The world is a hive where we struggle and strive ;
Mistakes may be many or few,
Turn out a blessing, or prove most distressing,
Just according to your point of view.

In the stress and the strife of everyday life
Should troubles come heavy on you,
You surmount them all, or topple and fall,
Just according to your point of view.

Your pal he gets rich while you're down in the ditch,
For you can't get a job to do ;
You pocket your pride, or commit suicide,
Just according to your point of view.

You're in love with a girl, you think she's a pearl,
But she doesn't think much of you ;
Like a stoic you part, or take it to heart,
Just according to your point of view.

But all joking aside, whatever betide,
There's one thing most certainly true ;
You may smile or frown, you are master or clown,
Just according to your point of view.

WHY SHOULD WE WALK IN THE SHADE?

When the earth is basking in sunshine
And nature her carpet hath laid,
O why should we choose the rough roadway?
Or why should we walk in the shade?

When the heart is aching with sorrow,
And doubtings that make us afraid,
There's a path that leads to God's uplands;
Then why should we walk in the shade?

There's far sweeping views from those uplands,
Of beauty that never will fade,
And radiant light all around us;
Then why should we walk in the shade?

Earth's fairest beauty adorneth the day,
The stars shed their glory by night;
The sea with its roar communes with the shore,
But deep things are hidden from sight.

THE VOICES.

There are voices all around us,
  There are kindred spirits near,
Calling, calling, ever calling,
  Tune your hearts and you shall hear.

"None return when once departed,"
  "None can lift for us the veil,"
This we say while never thinking
  It is we, not they who fail.

In our getting and our spending,
  And competing day by day,
We have crushed out finer feeling,
  We have set up gods of clay.

In the realm of worldly pleasure,
  With its glitter and its glare,
We have built our habitation ;
  Angels will not enter there.

But they stand upon the threshold
  With their message full of cheer,
Progress, onward, upward progress,
  Step by step from sphere to sphere.

There are voices all around us,
  Willing helpers ever near ;
Calling, calling, ever calling,
  Tune your hearts, be still and hear.

MAY (A MEMORY).

At Gilsland in the summer time,
When hedgerows blossom'd gay,
'Twas there I met, and see her yet,
My merry madcap May.

She seemed the gladdest bit of life
In all that smiling land,
As down the lane she bounding came,
Her bonnet in her hand.

The years went swiftly rolling by,
Again I saw her face ;
But now, how shy, how very shy,
How saintly in her grace.

We wandered to a rocky height,
Far spread the ocean blue ;
And there reclined in pensive mind,
And sweet communion knew.

These pictures of my memory
I frame them now in love ;
For darling May has gone away ;
She blooms in realms above.

A PRAYER.

O Lord, Who art both Love and Light,
To Thee we pray ;
We walk by faith, we have not sight,
Keep Thou our way.

Guide Thou our feet, we need Thy care,
Lest we should fall ;
Held by Thy hand we then may dare
And conquer all.

Pierce Thou the gloom of constant night
That holds our eyes,
And give us, Lord, that inner light
Which never dies.

Before the splendour of that light
May shadows flee,
And bring the dawn that ends our night,
Revealing Thee.

THE QUEST.

If nature's secret be your quest,
To feel her mystic thrill,
Just lay your head upon her breast,
And rest there very still.

Then she will yield you treasure trove,
'Twill set your heart aglow,
Embraced by universal Love
Home, singing you will go.

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